

## Icebreaker by nbfutureboy

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**Summary:**

Steve's annoying new eighth-grader friends officially induct him as an ally to their party. It's a prime opportunity for him to get to know that superhero buddy of theirs who keeps saving their skins.

(Eleven and Steve friendship - no romo. Just a ridiculous high schooler with no dignity, using the power of dumb music to worm his way into people's hearts.)

## Icebreaker

### Author's Note:

I have a lot of fun with characters who don't usually interact.

Full tracklisting is at the end.

"I'm tired of biking all the way over to your house when I need your help," Dustin complains one day. He's lying over the side of Steve's bed, and he's still got his shoes on. (Little shit.)

"I'm tired of you showing up," Steve shoots back, but he doesn't mean it.

"No, you're not! You treasure my valuable insight. I give you a world perspective that you wouldn't otherwise have."

"What you give me," Steve says firmly, giving up on his essay entirely and rising from his desk, "is a *headache*. What did you want, Dustin?"

At the first sign of danger - or the first sign of a much taller, much older kid looming over him - Dustin sits the right way up and swings his feet onto the floor. "Uh... How much do you know about Dungeons and Dragons?"

"Nothing."

"Okay, okay, right. Well. You know me, and Lucas, and Mike and El are all one group. That's a party."

Steve's been to parties that ended up worse, so he shrugs.

"But," Dustin continues, "we're a *full* party. Especially with Max now. So you can't be in it--"

"Are you just here to tell me I'm not invited to your weird little hangouts in the Wheeler's basement?" Steve interjects. "Because I have stuff to do, so--"

“No! I mean, I found away around that!”

And Steve sits back down gingerly in his office chair. *This* was a turn of events.

“Continue,” he says graciously.

Dustin pulls off his cap, ruffles his hair up nervously, and jams his cap back on again. “Well, at first we thought, ‘*hey, maybe Steve’s a friendly NPC who helps us out*’, but I said you were *waaaay* more than that. You could have your own party, maybe, with Na-- well, with whoever. Maybe... Maybe you’re a lone wolf at the moment?”

Steve doesn’t miss how the last sentence is phrased as a question, so he nods. ‘Lone wolf’ sounded cooler than *my girlfriend doesn’t love me, but didn’t dump me, and all my friends are thirteen now*.

“Okay, awesome,” says Dustin, standing up and heading to the window. “Then it’s settled.”

“Woah, woah, woah, *what’s* settled?” asks Steve, jumping to grab him by the sleeve. For crying out loud, why couldn’t any of these children use doors?

Dustin looks at him like he’s grown a second head. “We’re *allies*. That means we have to *communicate*. I had a set of REALISTIC walkie-talkies, but then my mom got me the headset model, so I gave one of my spares to Max. And now I’m giving the other one to you. Okay?”

There’s a stab of something in his chest he can’t quite place, but if Steve had to hazard a guess, it would be sentiment, or fondness, or possibly a heart murmur. (It’s not outside of the realms of possibility. His grandpa got those sometimes, so maybe it was a genetic thing.)

“Okay,” he mumbles, smoothing down his t-shirt.

Dustin grins. “Me and Mike’ll come over after school. Three forty-five.”

He ducks out of the window; Steve leans out to make sure he doesn’t fall to his death. To Dustin’s credit, he slides down the guttering with surprising dexterity - until he lands, very noisily on Mr. Harrington’s

grill.

"I'm okay!" he stage whispers, and pedals his bike down the driveway before the living room lights can turn on.

"*Steve? Did you hear that?*"

"Just a raccoon, Dad!" he bellows down the stairs, and takes a seat at his desk again to figure out how to conclude his damn essay. He might as well get it finished before Dustin's every thought gets broadcast into his room for the foreseeable future.

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Mike Wheeler's presence seems to steer Dustin away from the home-burglary-style entrance he's so fond of. It might be because the kid's had a serious growth spurt, and, more often than not, moves as if he's surprised to have limbs as long as he does. Steve's *been* there. Though it might equally be because it's broad daylight, and climbing through a second-floor window is slightly suspicious.

It's suspicious anyway, apparently.

"Steve, there's some *kids* on the porch asking after you," his mom says dubiously, because he hadn't managed to answer the doorbell in time. "What's going on?"

Steve's got a big mouth. Mike and Dustin have bigger.

"Mentoring," says Mike.

"He's teaching us--"

"Essay techniques?"

"My summer report was *really* bad this year," Dustin confesses. Steve thinks this might not be a lie.

"Oh," Steve's mother says. "Well... Work hard, Steve, make sure they

get home safe afterwards.”

Steve jerks his head towards the stairs. Mike elbows his counterpart, making sure both of them take off their shoes and coats at the door - evidently Nancy's perfectionism has given her younger brother *slightly* more manners than the average eighth-grader - before they follow him up.

“*Essay techniques?!*”

“Do we *look* like we can play basketball?” Mike points out.

Fair enough.

The two kids hunch, cross legged, over a notebook and a radio the size of a family-pack of bacon. It's around ten minutes of muffled bickering before they decide on the best way to teach Steve how to work the damn thing.

“Okay,” Dustin says finally, pressing the creases out of the notebook pages. It's squared paper, but they've scratched more text than numbers onto it. “Now we can call you if anything goes wrong.”

“Or you can call us,” Mike says.

“We've written down how to tune into the channels we use--” there's a switch on the front that Dustin jiggles - “and what batteries it takes, and--”

--“Etiquette,” Mike interrupts carefully.

“*Mike.*”

“You say ‘over’ when you've finished speaking, and ‘over and out’ when you've finished a conversation,” he says, ignoring Dustin's protests and jabbing at their bullet points. “And you can't hold down the talking button if someone else is speaking, otherwise no-one gets through. It's one at a time.”

“Okay,” says Steve, and is secretly very thankful for the list.

“One last thing.”

“Yeah?”

“That one there,” Dustin says, flicking the channel lever right to the end of the selections, “that’s El’s channel.”

“You mean, Mike’s girl? Hopper’s kid?”

“Yeah,” says Mike. Funny. He used to be way more touchy about that kind of thing when Nancy would tease him for it. “She can like, see you if you try to talk to her. Sometimes she talks back, even though she doesn’t have a walkie-talkie.”

“Superpowers,” Dustin clarifies.

“We’re working on getting her one, though. She’s not allowed out ‘til next year, so... Yeah.”

There’s something very, very miserable about the little wince that sets into the corners of Mike’s eyes. If Steve could fix it, he would.

But he can’t. So he settles for a clap on his shoulder instead.

“...Sorry, man.”

“It’s okay,” Mike says.

(It’s not.)

Dustin winces.

“Well,” Steve says, taking the walkie-talkie from the kid’s loose grasp, “hopefully we’ll never need it. I kinda want this Upside-Down-whatever to be over forever now.”

“You *can* just talk normally on it,” Mike says drily.

“Oh... Right.”

“I’m heading home, I have a chemistry test on Friday... You coming, Dustin?”

“Give me two seconds,” he says, and Steve braces himself for a barrage of curious questions. Whilst Mike wanders down the stairs to

pull his sneakers back on, Dustin tears the page from his notebook and slaps it onto Steve's desk.

The questions fail to come. "If you talk to El," he warns, because to be fair, Mike hadn't said he *wasn't* allowed but at the same time, it wasn't very likely they'd get in contact. "She, uh... She doesn't trust people that easily. You need to be patient with her. If you give her lots of time, she'll give *you* lots of time, but it's not instantaneous."

Steve's momentarily distracted from how 'instantaneous' is a very Dustin-like word. No wonder El and Mike got along so well - the way they worked was incredibly similar, because Mike rarely invested any time into anything he didn't deem trustworthy.

"You got it," Steve says amicably. He grins. "Now get the hell out of my house, Henderson."

"Roger that," Dustin says. "Oh, and Steve?"

"Yeah?"

"You spelled 'definitely' wrong in your report."

"*Dustin.*"

"I'm going, I'm *going*!"

God, he feels like a goddamned stay-at-home mother. These kids were going to be the death of him at some point.

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It's the following dawn, after he's completed his six AM workout, that Steve realises that he actually has quite a bit of time in the mornings and he could easily use it to make plans. Without Nancy to go and see, or his asshole ex-friends dragging him out to god-knows-where at god-knows-when-PM, he's been sleeping earlier and waking earlier.

It's been quite refreshing, really. Mornings for workouts. Afternoons,

after school, for basketball or jogging. Evenings for studying, and for being cut short to sleep.

He's quite grateful to Dustin and The Party for breaking up his routine so often, but he'd never tell them that.

Sweeping his assignments off the desk and into his backpack, he pulls out a sheet of paper and starts scribbling on it. The walkie-talkie instructions are pinned above his workspace now, and he glances up at them occasionally, wondering if he's making an enormous mistake.

*Icebreaker*, he writes as a heading. He underlines it with more force than necessary.

Is 'icebreaker' one word, or two?

Steve decides it looks cooler as one word, and manages to fill a whole page before he's forced to grab breakfast and drive to school.

He gets a pointed look from his teacher in Biology class for tapping his pen against the desk too loudly, which isn't great. Not that he can help it. Steve's distracted. He needs this to be good, if he wants to understand this kid. He's not even sure *why* he wants to figure her out so bad, but if the fate of the world's been determined by her not once but *twice* so far, and if the middle-schoolers really think she's the shit so much, then she has to be worth it.

Steve can't even concentrate during basketball practice. He figures even if he was focused, Billy Hargrove would shoot him dirty looks anyway.

*Icebreaker*

- Talk about: Name. Tell stories? Thanks for not letting us die

Once he's back in his room, and running through his ideas a second time, it suddenly seems a whole lot more idiotic. Good going, Steve. Real eloquent of you.



He makes the executive decision to avoid the awkwardness of initial introductions. *Hey, I'm, uhh, I'm Steve, I'm not Mike's sister's boyfriend, but I was at one point, and... Yeah... Hi.* Nope! Absolutely not.

*- Listen to: what would a guy like the Chief listen to? She's probably heard a lot of it. 70s? Then I could introduce her to some of my collection afterwards.*

It's a plan that might work, if he applies himself properly, or if he pushes it hard enough. There's a list of songs underneath. It's just a brainstorm of what they might have in the house, though, so Steve's next plan is to rummage through his parents' record collection in the den.

"Not that they'll even notice," he mutters to himself, flicking through his mom's disco collection. Eleven, according to The Party, doesn't know too much about culture. His guilty pleasures are apparently safe in the hands of a telekinetic adolescent.

It starts simply. Today's a Thursday; he's got nothing serious to do. Why not set up a gentle groove?

And that's how Steve Harrington ends up shuffling his feet in contained, but complicated rhythms, to the sounds of Wild Cherry.

"And just when-- it hit me-- somebody turned around and said: *play that funky music, white boy!!*"

He spins in place, still holding down the transmission button on his new walkie-talkie. No point being shy if he's gonna end up making a new friend. (Not that he hadn't checked the channel a hundred times, just in case he serenaded Lucas Sinclair by mistake, but that was a whole other matter.)

"Hey, El," he mumbles into the speaker, letting his hips pull him into the key change. "Heard you were on this channel. I'm Steve."

He doesn't say anything else - mostly because he can't think of

anything else to say - but he makes sure the transmission includes the cute little beat, and eventually switches it off.

The time is five in the evening, which is a perfect median between extra-curriculars and his mom's dinner plans. Steve makes a record of it. He's more likely to get results if he does the same thing at the same time, if he's been listening in science class closely enough, and so he pulls a couple of singles out to last him the next few days.

The following morning is a Friday. He manages to corner Nancy before third period, and not for the reason she seems to be expecting.

"Hey, Nance," he says, getting straight to the point as casually as possible, "remember telling me about when you and the Chief and your brother's friends made that psychic swimming pool last year? What did you have to do?"

Nancy stares at him like he's grown a second head. Steve rubs his neck self-consciously; he's actually getting concerned about this, because it's not for the first time this week.

"I'm *sorry*?"

"The swimming pool with the salt in. Why did she need that?"

"I don't," says Nancy, visibly faltering, and then, "it's dark. You're only focusing on yourself. No light, no sensation, and only white noise. That's how she could see you."

"What's white n--?"

"TV static, or wind, or whatever," she says sharply.

"...Oh."

"I have to get to class."

Nancy breezes by him, her arms full of books and her face full of guilty sadness, but Steve has all the answers. At four-fifty PM, he's putting on another record and a *blindfold*, and he's intending to lose himself in song and dance. He even pushes the couch back in the den. No sense in bashing his shins whilst on the radio, right?

“This is Vicki Sue Robinson,” he says into the speaker, and daringly scooches backwards on his heels. “[Turn The Beat Around](#), seventy-six-- it’s culture, El, it’s just *culture*. I can’t put films through this thing, but I *can* put some wicked music through it...”

There’s no response yet. Not even when he attempts a spin and ends up falling on his ass.

Steve figures he’ll give it a week before he gives up. Mike did three hundred and fifty three days, but Steve can’t *feel* anything, and he’s also never met the kid.

Maybe she’s not listening. He’s used to that.

Saturday is Little Eva day. [The Loco-Motion](#) is one of his mom’s faves - it’s actually quite fun to chat to no-one and do the train motions with his arms, despite the fact that he’s goofing off alone in his own basement.

No results. Yet.

Steve refuses to feel sorry for himself.

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It’s Sunday when he breaks, and switches back to the standard channel. It’s post-Sunday jog, because he likes to work up an appetite before his dad serves up their Sunday roast dinner, so he can blame the unsteady tone of his voice on breathlessness.

“Dustin?”

No answer.

“Dustin, are you there?” he tries again, clearing his throat. “It’s Steve. Uh... Over?”

“Steve, what’s up?” is the immediate reply, and Steve jolts with fright.

“Jesus, that’s loud.”

“Volume control is the bottom left knob,” Dustin supplies. Steve suddenly recalls that conversation via walkie-talkie is his worst nightmare, because there’s *no way to stop Dustin if he starts talking too much*.

“Thanks,” he says instead, hoping that’s going to be the end of it. “Listen, man, I was wondering - how do you know if Eleven is on the other end of the line? What does she do?”

“Are you trying to *talk* to her?”

“No,” says Steve immediately.

“Oh. Well, like Mike says, sometimes she’ll talk back. But he’s told me that sometimes he just... *knows* that she’s there? It’s like the place where the sensory deprivation tank would take her to.”

“The pool?”

“Yeah, except she doesn’t need something that strong anymore. That’s what Hopper said, anyways.”

“Right.”

“Tell her we said hi, if you see her,” says Dustin. His voice, crackling over the distance, is measured, yet flat.

Steve sighs, and presses the transmission button. “Yeah, buddy, I will.”

After *that* depressing shitshow, it’s time for something more cheery.

Risqué, even.

“*Gitchi gitchi ya ya da daa*-- I won’t tell your dad if you don’t,” he smirks into El’s channel. “But this *really* isn’t appropriate for a kid your age. *Creole Lady Marmalaaaaade--!*”

Well, as far as bad influences go, Steve isn’t the worst the Hopper kid could do. Not by a long shot.

Monday is when his report is due in, and to be honest, it's all the better for Dustin's spelling corrections. Steve likes to keep his head down at school these days - it's only a couple of months until he's out of here, after all, and seeing Nancy and Jonathan is just too much for him at the moment.

On the way home, however, he passes by Hopper's police truck. It's pulled over by the side of the road. He must be patrolling or something. Steve manages a two-fingered salute as he cruises past.

Hopper squints, trying to make out his face. When he works out it's that Harrington kid, he nods civilly in return.

Steve's not really sure what it means, but it seems fairly positive.

That night, he tries '[Blame It On The Boogie](#)', because it's got dance moves he can follow and it's a *classic*, for crying out loud. He thinks, for a second, that he feels someone watching him, and only briefly worries it might be his dad before the feeling disappears as quickly as it had come.

"It's actually quite a good workout," he notes to Dustin, who's crawled through his window as per, and is currently trying to crack a particularly tricky equation. "My shins are bruised to shit, though, I keep bumping into stuff."

"I can't *believe* you were trying to do this on the quiet," Dustin lisps. He shakes his head, delivering his disappointment through the pen jammed between his teeth: "I don't think it works if *you* keep trying to immerse yourself. You haven't got superpowers, Steve."

"Oh, that *stings*. You wound me, kid."

"Get over yourself, Harrington," he grins, rolling onto his back. "You're as normal as the rest of us. Deal with it."

It's not quite true; Steve thinks that their dysfunctional apocalypse group isn't the best point of comparison, but he keeps it to himself.

"Think she's ignoring me?"

"Probably. At this point, I just assume she's always watching."

“So should I go more extreme, or less?”

Dustin squints at his math book, and then lets it drop onto his face in defeat. “Why not try both?” he asks, through a veil of paper.

Now there was an idea.

Tuesday, therefore, after a particularly strenuous bout of basketball, is the day when he pulls out [the big guns](#).

“You know what Eurovision is?” he says into the walkie-talkie. “It’s this big contest in Europe where each country puts a singing group into a competition. It’s really hardcore, if you like glitter.”

And that’s when it happens - a crackle, as soon as he releases the button to close the channel on his end. Through the darkness of the blindfold, and the cringy, enjoyable embarrassment that came with dancing to outdated music, Steve hears something.

It’s a distant, but unreserved giggle.

“So, glitter?” he asks immediately, grinning. “Nice. I’m not a fan, but I can work with that.”

Now there’s nothing on the other end. He’s not going to lose this, though.

“Not glitter? Are you laughing at my dancing? I’m guessing you can see me, I didn’t think it was *that* bad--”

And there it is again - it’s a little titter that signifies he’s done something right for a change.

Steve mimes playing the saxophone for the breaks inbetween the lyrics, and then waves his hands in the air for the final chorus. *Woah-oh-oh ohh!! Waterloo!! Finally facing my Waterloo!*

When the record shuts off, he feels all the warmth rush from the basement, and knows he’s alone again.

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'More extreme' worked, to an extent. He provoked a laugh. It's good shit.

Weird sparkly tracksuits and inaccurate history analogies might only work so far, though, and Steve's mom is out of mortifying records. It's still classic, sure, but Steve hardly wants to be caught flipping through shitty cringe tracks at the record store, so he decides to go with 'less'.

It takes a while for him to find the next great track.

By the time he's been out, discovered the perfect single, bought it, and driven home, his mother's admonished him for failing to turn up on time for dinner. It ends up being well past seven thirty when he ducks into the den, chanting apologies into his walkie-talkie and tuning it to the correct channel.

"Sixty-seven," he mumbles as a precursor, setting the needle down gently and pulling the blindfold over his eyes. "It's earlier, but that just means it's got [a bit more class...](#)"

It's not really a dancing track, so he lies on the rug. The floor of the den is more comfortable than where Dustin does his homework in Steve's bedroom, but adolescent kids like Dustin still seem to be squishy enough to cope with that.

He folds his hands over his chest and lets the music wash over him.

*I wish I knew how it would feel to be free...*

It's teeth-gritting stuff. Whilst the Harringtons own similar material, stashed away in the depths of the house, there's something more emotional about Nina Simone's music than the rest of his mom's collection. There's no way Steve could goof his way through this one, as much as he wants to pretend to be as dumb as his evening calls to El have gotten.

It's more serious than that.

It feels like a dream - there's the cushioning of the shag rug his

parents banished to the basement at his back, but at the same time, there's a thin, watery darkness surrounding him. Steve feels like if he concentrates enough, he can picture that kid he saw in the Byers' home opposite him; not with the buzzed head of legend, though, or the slicked back MTV hair, but with a corkscrew-style mane to rival Mike's.

It scares him, kinda, that such a tiny kid could have the expression she did when she saved them from the demo-dogs that night. In the Byers' seventies-style house, all brown and floral and littered with crayon drawings, she'd looked at Mike Wheeler like she'd move the damn world out of orbit for him. Oh, Steve doesn't doubt that she would, or *could*, not for a single second.

And in this little dream world he's conjured up, they're lying next to each other. Not in the Harrington's den, but on the rug, in the void.

*I wish I could I could live... Like I'm longing to live...*

It'd be easy to say, 'hey, El', or words to that effect. He doesn't. The moment's like an eggshell - intact, but fragile.

In the darkness of his mind's eye, they share a look. Is it a dream? Or is this what everyone keeps telling him about? That El could find you, could *see* you, even if she wasn't there at all? There's no expression on his face, or hers, but there's no denying that they're both listening out for one another.

The record spins into a fade out, and then ripples with static to let its audience know the song had concluded.

Steve can't see El anymore, but that cold rush to signify she'd left hadn't flooded into the basement just yet. He slips off the blindfold gingerly, and gets to his feet to remove the vinyl from the player.

He wants to ask what she thought of it. If that one's been her favourite so far. If she even heard it at all.

But he doesn't have to. A soft, but curt voice clicks its way through the speakers of his radio:

*"...Goodnight, Steve."*



And that was all.

“Yeah,” he reports back. “See you tomorrow.”

He remembers the sheet pinned above his desk. With the smallest of smirks, he tags on one last statement; *etiquette*, he thinks.

“...Over and out, El.”

Steve collapses the antennae of the walkie-talkie, and bounds back upstairs to his room.

### **Author's Note:**

Thanks for reading! You can find me on tumblr at my [main](#) or my [fic blog](#), so come say hi if you like ♥

Wild Cherry - Play That Funky Music

Vicki Sue Robinson - Turn The Beat Around

Little Eva - The Loco-Motion

Patti Labelle - Lady Marmalade

The Jackson Five - Blame It On The Boogie

ABBA - Waterloo

Nina Simone - I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free